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RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0029
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SUBJECT: OMANI FOREIGN MINISTER SHARES THOUGHTS ON SOMALIA

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi told Ambassador on December 24 that Oman was not directly involved in efforts to resolve conflicts in either Somalia or Sudan. The Omani government does, however, strongly support Arab League (AL) endeavors to quell violence in both countries. Bin Alawi noted that although former Omani diplomat Salim al-Khusaibi continues to work for the AL on Somalia, his activities are independent of direction from Muscat.

¶2. (C) Bin Alawi claimed that the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Somalia could be "controlled" through diplomacy, and advised against "pushing them into a corner." He said that there were many "moderate" Islamists in Somalia, but added that Al Qaida "may have penetrated" the Islamic movement there. Bin Alawi commented that the transitional Somali government, which he characterized as "very weak," should join with moderate Islamic leaders to form "some sort of coalition" to help restore order. He further counseled that elections should be held in Somalia "in two to three years" to install a functioning, national government. If events continued to spiral out of control, bin Alawi feared that Somalia could "become another Afghanistan" and fuel instability in Yemen. While there currently were few Somali refugees in Oman, bin Alawi said that widespread violence in Somalia could greatly increase this number. (Note: Somalis in Oman generally enter by land from Yemen. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Bin Alawi stated that the AL did not yet have a firm position on how to resolve the conflict in Somalia, though he noted that the League was trying to bring representatives of the UIC and transitional government together for talks in Khartoum. "The transitional government has to listen," he asserted. Given Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia, and the possibility of Eritrean involvement, bin Alawi feared the outbreak of another Ethiopian-Eritrean war "which would make matters even worse." According to bin Alawi, an envoy from Ethiopia was planning to come to Muscat for talks with Sultan Qaboos and senior Omani officials.

¶4. (U) Minimize considered.

GRAPPO